



February 27, 2023

Education Policy Committee
Minnesota House of Representatives
Minnesota Legislature

Sent via email

Dear members of the Education Policy Committee:

We are the Twin Cities Chapter of the Foundation Against Intolerance & Racism (FAIR), a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing civil rights and liberties for all Americans and promoting a common culture based on fairness, understanding, and humanity. Our website, fairforall.org, can give you a fuller sense of our mission and activities. Thank you for your careful consideration of our thoughts regarding *HF 1502 (Rep. Sencer-Mura) Ethnic Studies Graduation Requirement*.

We at FAIR believe that our future depends to a significant degree on our ability to teach our children those nonpartisan habits and values necessary to the proper functioning of a liberal democracy such as ours. This includes a fact-based, balanced, and honest account of our nation's history—both its revolutionary founding promise of freedom and equality, as well as the times we have failed to keep that promise. As we experience declining confidence in our institutions, as we observe illiberal ideas and practices gaining momentum, it is more important than ever to teach the next generation of Minnesotans why America's founding ideals were so essential to the progress we have made, and are so essential to the progress we must still make.

We are very concerned by Minnesota's sudden push for standards and curricula—particularly in the fields of ethnic and social studies—that present only a single, partisan view of American history as well as of various contemporary issues. In its current form, HF 1502 would have Minnesota schools teach a version of ethnic studies that is overtly political in nature; this should concern Minnesotans of all backgrounds and political beliefs. Minnesota is not the first state to be faced with this dilemma. Across the country, many legislatures, departments of education,

school leaders and educators have already decided on the kind of ethnic studies that will be taught in their schools. Here in Minnesota, we still have a choice: should our brand of ethnic studies be inclusive and nonpartisan, or non-inclusive and partisan? The latter, often referred to as “liberated” ethnic studies, is clearly favored by activist groups such as EdLib Minnesota.

The vast majority of Minnesota parents favor an inclusive, non-partisan approach to ethnic studies. This type of education broadens students’ understanding of American history and the important contributions that have been made by people of all ethnic backgrounds. It highlights ethnic groups’ positive impact on the broader society and teaches respect for individuals who, despite discrimination, have led exemplary lives. Inclusive ethnic studies avoids a zero-sum mindset in which gains for one group mean losses for another and rejects the noxious idea that society’s main currency is power and privilege. It also properly rejects the notion that “group identity” should be the primary lens through which history, society, culture, and politics are to be understood. Most significantly, it advances the positive, constructive view that an individual’s personal characteristics — such as character, personality, interests, and talents — contribute substantially to their future purpose and success¹.

In contrast, “liberated” ethnic studies is the product of an activist political movement that is heavily focused on race consciousness and identity politics. This movement appears to be intent on alienating the youth from our institutions and on emphasizing victimization rather than agency. Proponents of liberated ethnic studies dismiss racial progress as a mirage and instead seek to heighten our citizens’ awareness of immutable differences such as race, ethnicity, and gender. This illiberal theory seeks to delegitimize ideas that rest at the core of our American identity: individual merit, tolerance, the rule of law, compromise through reasoned discussion, etc. Despite the fact that these values prevent both anarchy and tyranny, “liberationists” undermine these ideals by claiming that they exist only to maintain various kinds of “unearned privilege”. Worse, these same people actively seek to turn our children into activists who, they hope, will radically transform their schools, their communities, and their nation².

HF1502 defines “Ethnic Studies” as follows:

“... the critical and interdisciplinary study of race, ethnicity, and indigeneity with a focus on the experiences and perspectives of people of color within and beyond the United States. Ethnic studies analyzes the ways in which race and racism have been and continue to be powerful social, cultural, and political forces, and the connection of race to other groups of stratification, including gender, class, sexuality, religion, and legal status.”³

¹ Honig, B (2022). Schools Should Opt for Inclusive Ethnic Studies. Edsource.org.

² Ibid.

³ A bill for an act creating an ethnic studies requirement, Minnesota Statutes 2022, section 120B.025, Subd. 1.

The proposed model curriculum framework, focused on power dynamics and intersectionality, is replete with the “liberated” version of ethnic studies. For example:

- “(a) The model curriculum must:
- (2) include a **power, race, class, and gender analysis** as part of the course via literature, discussion, classwork, and homework as the analysis relates to ethnic studies courses; and
 - (3) include an **intersectional analysis** of climate, health, food, housing, education, and policy.
- (b) The model ethnic studies curriculum must include the following topics:
- (1) Latinx studies;
 - (2) African American studies;
 - (3) Asian American studies;
 - (4) Indigenous or First Nation studies; or
 - (5) introduction to ethnic studies.”⁴

FAIR Twin Cities strongly encourages the Education Policy Committee and the Minnesota State Legislature to take a pause. We ask you to carefully assess whether, considering the burden of current graduation requirements as well as the strain that a new course mandate would place on many schools, HF1502 is even necessary. In any case, do not rush into adopting HF1502 and an ethnic studies graduation requirement for Minnesota’s school children. Finally, if ethnic studies must be taught in Minnesota, it should be inclusive and nonpartisan, rather than the “liberated” and politicized version.

Sincerely,



Jeff Campbell
Chapter Leader
FAIR Twin Cities

⁴ Ibid, Subd. 6(a)-(b)